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ABSTRACT

A study examined the sentiment and impact of different types, channels, and forms of aggression against the Arab-American community during the Gulf Crisis. Data were selected from entries in the 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination (ADC) National Office. Results show that there were 129 acts of aggression vented against Arab-Americans during the first four months of the Gulf Crisis. Offensive language, threats, and ethnic slurs were used most, through the channels of print, face-to face encounters and radio respectively. The primary form of face-to-face aggression was verbal, although even physical attacks against Arab students occurred on American college campuses after the United States bombed Libya. Stereotyping not only has a harmful effect on the Arab community, but can cause psychological damage to Arab youngsters, who must cope with students who ridicule them in school. The study concluded that negative stereotyping plays a large role in shaping or reinforcing bigotry, and that additional scholarly research is called for. (Four tables of data are included; 49 references are attached.) (PRA)

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Arab-Americans and the Gulf Crisis

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(presented)

at

Sixty-First Annual Convention of the

Southern States Communication Association

Tampa, FL - April 1991

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Abstract

With the advent of the Gulf Conflict and President Bush's New World Order, anti-Arab violence has been escalating in the United States. The 2.5 million Arab-Americans, both Christians and Muslims, have been confronted with waves of anti-Arab sentiment and terrorist actions. Using content analysis of the (1) types of aggression, (2) channels of aggression, and (3) forms of aggression, this paper seeks to examine such sentiment and its impact on the Arab-American community.

Running head: Gulf Crisis

Arab-Americans and the Gulf Crisis

Although intolerance is not inherent in the U.S. Constitution, it all too often appears to be alive and well in the minds of the population at large. The fact that such behavior occurs on a daily basis against ethnic minority groups is reprehensible. It is equally shocking to see such action taking place as a consequence of American foreign policy. For example, German Americans became the victims of U.S. foreign policy and the intolerance which it bred among American society during World Wars I and II. CBS News correspondent Charles Karault once said "I had a proud old patriot of a grandfather who lost his job in a Springfield rifle factory during World War I because his name, Karault, sounded German" (America Tonight, 1990, Oct. 25). Also, the loyalty of Japanese Americans was questioned during World War II. Subsequently, they were harassed, threatened, ostrasized, and interned in concentration camps under Executive Order 9066 (Okihiro and Sly, 1983).

With the advent of the Gulf Conflict and President Bush's New World Order, anti-Arab violence has been escalating in the United States. The 2.5 million Arab-Americans, both Christians and Muslims, have been confronted with waves of anti-Arab sentiment and terrorist actions. One would hope that such mentality would have diminished after so long. Unfortunately, it is still thriving in mainstream America. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine anti-Arab-American sentiment and

its impact on the Arab-American community.

Background

Before the Gulf Crisis. Although anti-Arab-American sentiment rose significantly once the Gulf Crisis began, aggression against this community has been happening on a regular basis long before then. For example, many Arab-Americans have been beaten up on the streets just because they looked like Arabs. Gest (1987) pointed out that the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination (ADC) counted 42 cases of harassment or violence in 22 cities in 1986. Their community centers and mosques across the U.S. were attacked after a TWA airplane was hijacked overseas (Lerner, 1986). Most notable of all was the 1985 murder of the 41-year old Alex Odeh, who was the former president of the ADC. This violent action took place following the hijacking of the Italian passenger ship Achille Lauro.

> After the announcement of the U.S. bombing in Libya, ADC reports that five Arab students from Syracuse University were beaten up in a pub. One of the students may lose sight in one eye. A Saudi Arabian student in New Haven was assaulted outside a bar. And, an Egyptian medical student required medical treatment after he was beaten in the street of Royal Oak, Michigan. In each case, the assailants are reported to have made derogatory remarks about Arabs. (Lerner, 1986, p. 24)

Arab-Americans are discriminated against because of their national origin. For instance, "sociologist Majid Al-Khazraji

had taken St. Francis College of Loretto, PA. to court on charges of denying him tenure because he is Iraqi born" (Gest, 1987, pp. 10-11). The ADC President Dr. Albert Mokhiber filed a brief with the Supreme Court "which held that Arab-Americans are eligible for protection under the Civil Rights Act" (ADC Times, 1990, Sept.-Oct., p. 3).

Similar to the predicament of the Japanese Americans during World War II, the Arab-Americans of today always find their loyalty to this country questioned. They are compelled repeatedly to justify themselves to their fellow U.S. citizens whenever a problem develops in the Middle East. For example, a young Arab-American who had immigrated to this country worked as a full-time member of the ADC staff in Detroit. When a caller to the ADC office cast aspersions on his loyalty, the young man answered: "'My sister is in the Marines, I'm in the auxiliary police, and our whole family is involved in volunteer work in our community. What right have you to ask us to justify ourselves?'" (Lerner, 1986, p. 24).

Equally important, the U.S. government has been allegedly targeting Arab-Americans as prime suspects for God knows what while menacing these individuals with challenges to their freedom and constitutional rights. One such case occured in 1987 when "FBI and INS agents arrested and threatened Arab immigrants with deportation because their political views varied from the government's" (The American Council Political Action Committee (ACPAC), 1991, Jan. 14).

> In 1986, the Department of Justice and Immigration (INS) developed the 'Alien Terrorist and Undesirable: A Contingency Plan' targeting only Arabs and Muslims. A new jail described as being 'a good place to put about 5,000 Arabs,' was established specifically for this plan. (ACPAC, 1991, Jan. 14)

Since the Gulf Crisis. From the outset of the Gulf Crisis, new waves of violence have arisen against Arab-Americans. A Saudi couple, for instance, was beaten at a Sharpestown Mall. When "they protested that they were Saudis, the attackers stated 'We don't care. You're Arab'" (ADC Log, 1990, p. 6).

> An Iranian-American family, mistaken as Arabs, reported that they were attacked and beaten by members of a road crew. The father received a fractured skull and is partially paralyzed. One of the attackers was quoted as saying. 'I want to kill these foreigners to teach them a lesson about complaining in our country.' (ADC Log, 1990, p. 1)

An Arab-American family in Cleveland, OH, was forced to sell their home and move because of the harassment, threats, throwing of stink bombs, turfing their lawn, and other forms of violence which were perpetrated against them (ADC Log, 1990). The Boston Globe reported that an Arab-American in Charlestown, MA was forced to move out of his apartment within 24 hours because of threats which the landlord received (ADC

Log, 1990).

Commercial airlines such as Northwest, and Pan American have shown a pronounced effort to discriminate against Arab-Americans. A case in point involved two Arab-American women who were forced to leave a Northwest airplane after they had already boarded it. Then these ladies were strip-searched, their belongings were dumped out and their empty luggage X-rayed (ADC Times, 1990, Nov.). Pan American even went so far as to refuse to sell a ticket to an Iraqi-American. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the airline for this transgression. Dr. Mokhiber, the president of the ADC pointed out that

> in the 1950s, the civil rights movement in this country began when African Americans could only ride in the back of the bus. Here 40 years later, Arab nationals and perhaps permanent residents are being told not only not in the back of the plane but not on the plane at all. That just smacks of racism. (CNN Crossfire, 1991, p. 3)

Likewise, racial remarks, ethnic slurs, demeaning comments and graffitti, such as "Ragheads", "Sandsuckers", "Nuke the Towelheads", "A-rab", "Camel Jockey", and "Sand Niggers Go Home" are used against Arabs. T-shirts, baseball hats, bumper stickers, and an instant Arab Halloween kit have come to symbolize the merchandizing of this American hate campaign against Arab-Americans. One particular T-shirt portrays "U.S. war planes attacking an Arab riding a camel and armed with a

whip" (ADC Log, 1990, p. 5). It is accompanied by the slogan "'I'd fly 10,000 miles to smoke a camel'" (ADC Times, 1990, Nov., p. 9). "'Smoke' is military jargon meaning to destroy" (ADC Log, 1990, p. 5).

A number of broadcasting stations around the country have also been airing discriminatory blurbs, anti-Arab jokes, anti-Arab traditions and satire of the Islamic religion. These have appeared on national television talk-shows (i.e., Donahue) and on nationally syndicated radio talk-shows such as those hosted by Bruce Williams, Howard Stern and Pat Cooper. On their talk-show, Stern and Cooper said that "Arabs cover their women because they are so horney they can't control themselves. And, Arabs are dogs, so treat them as such. Take a newspaper and hit them on the head when they misbehave" (ADC Log, 1990, p. 5).

Furthermore, FBI agents across the country were authorized to interview Arab-American businesses and community leaders since January 7, 1991.

> The stated purpose of the interview is twofold 1) to advise the Arab community of the potential for anti-Arab backlash in the event of war in the Middle East and 2) to solicit information from Arab-Americans regarding possible terrorist activity by Iraqis or their agents against U.S. targets. Such an action implies that Arab-Americans have some innate knowledge of such activity merely because of their ethnicity. In some cases, FBI agents probed

> further...into the personal and political opinions of the Arab-American population. (ADC Action Alert, 1991, Jan. 17)

Methodology

Sampling. The sample is selected from the 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log of the ADC National Office.

> The ADC is a non-sectarian, non-partisan service organization committed to defending the rights and promoting the heritage of Arab-Americans. The largest grassroots Arab-American organization in the United States, ADC was founded in 1980 by U.S. Senator James G. Abourezk in response to stereotyping, defamation, and discrimination directed against Americans of Arab origin.

The log contains 69 entries of violence from August through November 1990. Three of these entries are excluded from the analysis because one of them is related to an ADC letter (National Office) to FBI Director, William Session, informing him about the rise of hate crimes against Arab-Americans and requesting a directive to that effect. In the other two cases, the acts of aggression were committed outside the United States (Athens and Madrid) although they were carried out by Pan American personnel. Consequently, the data are obtained from the remaining 66 entries.

Data Analysis. Content analysis is employed for the purpose of examining anti-Arab-American sentiment from the beginning of the Gulf Crisis and its impact on this particular

community. The data are coded and evaluated according to the (1) types of aggression, (2) channels of aggression, and (3) forms of aggression.

1) Types of aggression are explained in terms of the kinds of belligerence which are exerted. These include harassment, threat, offensive language, ethnic slur, religious aggression, physical aggression, negative stereotyping, discrimination, and vandalism.

2) Channels of aggression are the means through which aggressive acts are conveyed. They consist of face-to-face, radio, television, telephone, print, and 'other'. The category 'other' mainly contains aggression, such as discrimination and vandalism, that is committed through means not included under the preceding five channels.

3) Forms of aggression are verbal and nonverbal. Verbal aggression is comprised of violent acts that are expressed through radio, television, and telephone. Nonverbal aggression reflects violent acts which are conveyed through the categories of print and 'other'. Face-to-face is used for verbal and nonverbal aggression.

Results

The results show that there is a total of 129 acts of aggression vented against Arab-Americans during the first four months of the Gulf Crisis. These violent acts were carried out in 21 states and include 47 U.S. cities/counties plus the District of Columbia as seen in Table 1. The total number of

aggressive acts committed in the U.S. cities/counties is greater by 7 than those committed in U.S. states. That is because the hostility which took place in the District of Columbia is added to that of the U.S. cities/counties. The leading states with hate crimes against Arab-Americans are (1) Texas (15 percent), (2) California and Maryland (8 percent each), (3) Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania (7 percent each), and (4) Michigan (6 percent). Meanwhile, the leading cities/counties having such hate crimes are (1) Houston (7 percent), (2) Gaithersburg (6 percent) (3) Dallas, New Brunswick, New York, and Washington, D.C. (5 percent each), and (4) Detroit and Cleveland (4 percent each). It is important to mention that all aggressive acts that are disclosed through the state only are diregarded from the cities/counties ranking.

Insert Table 1 about here

Type of aggression is led by offensive language and threat (23 percent each) and followed closely by ethnic slur (20 percent) as shown in Table 2. Most of the aggressive acts of these three variables are expressed verbally. It worth noting that harassment, religious aggression, and negative stereotyping are vented mainly through verbal aggression while physical aggression, discrimination, and vandalism are conveyed primarily through nonverbal aggression.

Regarding the form of aggression, the principle verbal

aggression is ethnic slur (30 percent) succeeded by threat (24 percent). Although offensive language (21 percent) is the third highest cateogory under verbal aggression, it is the chief category (27 percent) for nonverbal aggression. Threat and vandalism (21 percent each) are second under nonverbal aggression. Overall, about (63 percent) of the aggressive behavior is carried out verbally while the balance is expressed nonverbally.

Insert Table 2 about here

Considering the individual channel of aggression, Table 3 demonstrates that print (37 percent) is the main channel for offensive language. Face-to-face (41 percent) and radio (46 percent) are the primary channels for threat and ethnic slurs respectively. It is worth mentioning that face-to-face is the sole channel for physical aggression while television is used mainly for negative stereotypes. Telephone is the main channel for harassment while the majority of discrimination and vandalism are conveyed through the category 'other'. Religious aggression, however, is diffused through both radio and print media.

Overall, face-to-face is leading channel for threat while radio and television are the principle channels for ethnic slur. Telephone is the main channel for harassment. Print and 'other' head the list of channels for offensive language and

vandalism respectively.

Insert Table 3 about here

As illustrated in Table 4, the formost channels of aggression for the forms of aggressive acts are (1) face-to-face (28 percent), (2) telephone and print (19 percent each), and (3) radio (16 percent). The main channel for verbal aggression is face-to-face (33 percent) while print (50 percent) is the primary one for nonverbal aggression. It is significant to add that face-to-face represents almost one-fifth of the nonverbal aggression.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

Although the number of hate crimes carried out against Arab-American tends to be much larger than reported, the frequency of such behavior is (1.08) acts per day. The rate of aggressive acts per U.S. state is (6.14) while it is estimated to be about (2.69) acts per U.S. city/county. Ostensibly, such percentages may be relatively low. But, taking into account the fact that the ratio of Arab-Americans to the U.S. population at large is less than (.01), these percentages are rather high for such a small group.

This aggression against Arab-Americans may be attributed,

in part, to the media in the United States. Over the years, Arabs have been negatively stereotyped. Arab males have been portrayed in the media as either terrorists or as "rich, corrupt, dimwitted, sneaky, hook-nosed, fat, oily and oversexed sheiks" (Shaheen, 1990, Aug. 19). Simultaneously, Arab females have been portrayed as "asexual, cubby-cheeked belly dancers" (Shaheen, 1990, Aug. 19). Such negative stereotyping can serve either as a shaper or a reinforcer. For those who already are bigoted and prejudicial, negative stereotyping serves as a reinforcer to what already exists in their minds. This is particularly true "since people...select information consistent with their attitudes and other frames of reference" (Littlejohn, 1989, p. 273). The media can also play the role of a shaper of public attitudes and opinions. For example, the media influenced public attitudes and opinions against Japanese Americans during World War II. This action, in fact, helped the U.S. government implement the Executive Order 9066, thereby forming the basis for permitting concentration camps for Japanese Americans (Okihiro and Sly, 1983).

Although negative stereotyping can have a harmful effect on the community it portrays, the psychological damage tends to be even worse for youngsters in that community. For example, a six-year old Arab-American boy asked his mother to "change his name to something that 'sounds more American' and requested that she not speak to him in Arabic outside the home or send him to school with pita bread. Classmates call him 'camel

Jockey' and Qaddafi's brother'" (Lerner, 1986, p. 24). A student from New Brunswick, NJ said that she

> decided not to tell her professors that she is an Arab raised in Kuwait. 'I tell them I am Greek...because they are really nasty if they know you're Palestinian and Muslim...I wish I could say I'm Palestinian but I feel I can't even write an essay. I can't write what I want to write. I can't really express myself the way I want. (ADC Log, 1990, p. 5).

Whether negative attitudes towards Arab-Americans are formed by the media or as a consequence of George Bush's New World Order, the outcome is the same 'aggression against Arab-Americans'. Such action, however, has been denounced by

> more than 75 national and local peace, justice, and religious organizations as well as by close to 100 notable individuals including Coretta S. King widow of slain civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (ADC Times, 1990, Sept.-Oct., p. 5).

While this study has analyzed anti-Arab-American sentiment during the first four months of the Gulf Crisis, additional scholarly research is needed. Still, this work can serve as a basis for further examination into this area. Ultimately, such analysis is indispensible in order to help achieve a better understanding of the problem and to lead to better communication among all human beings.

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Table 1

Cities/Counties and Hate Crime against Arab-Americans

City/County	Number	%	State	Number	%
China Lake	1	0.8	CA	10	8.2
Los Angeles	3	2.2			
Orange County	1	0.8			
San Diego	3	2.2			
San Francisco	1	0.8			
Santa Ana	1	0.8			
*	1	0.8	CT	2	1.6
Hartford	1	0.8			
*	1	0.8	FL	2	1.6
Orlando	1	0.8			
Augusta	1	0.8	GA	3	2.5
Savannah	2	1.6			
Chicago	2	1.6	IL	4	3.3
Springfield	2	1.6			
*	2	1.6	IN	6	4.9
Fort Wayne	4	3.1			
Boston	2	1.6	MA	8	6.6
*	1	0.8			
Charlestown	3	2.2			
Detroit	2	1.6			
Frostberg	2	1.6	MD	10	8.2
Gaithersburg	8	6.1			
Detroit	5	3.9	MI	7	5.7
Dearborn	1	0.8			
Flint	1	0.8			
*	1	0.8	MO	6	4.9
Kansas City	3	2.2			
Springfield	2	1.6			
Omaha	1	0.8	NB	1	0.8
*	1	0.8	NH	1	0.8
New Brunswick	7	5.3	NJ	8	6.6
Patterson	1	0.8			
Albuquerque	2	1.6	NM	2	1.6
New York	6	4.7	NY	6	4.9
*	1	0.8	OH	8	6.6
Cleveland	5	3.9			
Columbus	2	1.6			

Table 1-Continued

City/County	Number	%	State	Number	%
*	7	5.3	PA	9	7.4
Quakertown	2	1.6			
Providence	2	1.6	RI	2	1.6
Dallas	7	5.3	TX	18	14.8
Houston	9	6.9			
*	2	1.6			
Arlington	1	0.8	VA	5	4.1
Herndon	2	1.6			
Sterling	2	1.6			
Madison	4	3.1	WI	4	3.3
Washington, D.C.	7	5.3			
Total	129			122	

Source. 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log - National Office (August 1990 through November 1990)

Note. * No specific city/county mentioned in the report.

The total number of hate crimes in the U.S. cities/-counties is more than the total number of hate crimes in U.S. states because the District of Columbia is included in the former.

Table 2

Type of Aggression and Form of Aggression

Type of Aggression	Total	%	Verbal	%	Nonverbal	%
Harassment	11	8.5	11	100.0 13.6		
Threat	29	22.5	19	65.5 23.5	10	34.5 20.8
Offensive Language	30	23.3	17	56.7 20.9	13	43.3 27.1
Ethnic Slur	26	20.2	24	92.3 29.6	2	7.7 4.2
Religious Aggression	11	8.5	7	63.6 8.6	4	36.4 8.3
Physical Aggression	5	3.9			5	100.0 10.4
Negative Stereotyping	2	1.6	2	100.0 2.5		
Discrimination	5	3.9	1	20.0 1.2	4	80.0 8.3
Vandalism	10	7.8			10	100.0 20.8
Total	129		81		48	

Source. 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log - National Office (August 1990 through November 1990)

Table 3

Type of Aggression and Channel of Aggression

Type of Aggression	Total	Face-to-face	Radio	TV	Telephone	Print	Other
Harassment	11	27.3 8.3			72.7 32.0		
Threat	29	41.4 33.3			24.1 28.0	34.5 41.7	
Offensive Language	30	13.3 11.1	16.7 25.0	6.7 22.2	20.0 24.0	36.7 45.8	6.7 13.3
Ethnic Slur	26	23.1 16.7	46.2 60.0	15.4 44.4	7.7 8.0		7.7 13.3
Religious Aggression	11	18.2 5.6	27.3 15.0	9.1 11.1	9.1 4.0	27.3 12.5	9.1 6.7
Physical Aggression	5	100.0 13.9					
Negative Stereotyping	2			100.0 22.2			
Discrimination	5				20.0 4.0		80.0 26.7
Vandalism	10	40.0 11.1					60.0 40.0
Total	129	36	20	9	25	24	15

Source. 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log - National Office (August 1990 through November 1990)

Table 4

Channel of Aggression and Form of Aggression

Channel of Aggression	Total	%	Verbal	%	Nonverbal	%
Face-to-face	36	27.9	27	75.0 33.3	9	25.0 18.8
Radio	20	15.5	20	100.0 24.7		
Television	9	6.9	9	100.0 11.1		
Telephone	25	19.4	25	100.0 30.9		
Print	24	18.6			24	100.0 50.0
Other	15	11.6			15	100.0 31.3
Total	129		81		48	

Source. 1990 Anti-Arab Discrimination and Hate Crimes Log - National Office (August 1990 through November 1990)